> “Veganism is a way of living which seeks to exclude, as far as is possible and practicable, all forms of exploitation of, and cruelty to, animals for food, clothing or any other purpose.”

…but why?

Frequently, I encounter people arguing in favor of veganism because they “love animals” or “animals are nice.” While these are sentiments are not wrong, let’s take a look at the debate from a logical perspective. Here, four inter-linked arguments are summarized with supporting peer-reviewed citations.

1. Vertebrate animals have essentially the same basic neurobiology and central nervous systems that we have. They feel both physical (and likely emotional) pain, as well as fear, in a similar manner to humans. They actively avoid pain and scary situations and don't want to die. While this is all routinely acknowledged by biologists, we are loath to attribute these traits to farmed animals. This denial is rooted in a type of cognitive dissonance (this is not an unsubstantiated claim; see Bastian et al. 2012). Despite differences in anatomy, some invertebrate animals also exhibit these traits (Elwood 2011).

2. Many animals display levels of cognition and/or consciousness not terribly far from our own, or at least on a similar level of animals for which we consider consumption/exploitation to be immoral (e.g., dogs). Evidence of animal behavior which shows complex problem-solving, insight, consideration of past experiences, empathy, etc. is widespread. Numerous examples from across the animal kingdom abound. For reviews, see: Griffin and Speck 2004 and Shettleworth 2001. In 2012, several prominent neuroscientists drafted and signed The Cambridge Declaration on Consciousness. This document, among other things, states:

   > “Convergent evidence indicates that non-human animals have the neuroanatomical, neurochemical, and neurophysiological substrates of conscious states along with the capacity to exhibit intentional behaviors. Consequently, the weight of evidence indicates that humans are not unique in possessing the neurological substrates that generate consciousness. Non-human animals, including all mammals and birds, and many other creatures, including octopuses, also possess these neurological substrates.”

3. Humans do not require the consumption of animals or animal products in order to be healthy. This is very well-documented and an animal-free diet likely confers several health benefits in comparison to a ‘standard’ diet (Barnard et al.

2009; Craig 2009; Tonstad et al. 2009; Sabaté and Wien 2010). The American Dietetic Association's position paper states:

> "It is the position of the American Dietetic Association that appropriately planned vegetarian diets, including total vegetarian or vegan diets, are healthful, nutritionally adequate, and may provide health benefits in the prevention and treatment of certain diseases. Well-planned vegetarian diets are appropriate for individuals during all stages of the life cycle, including pregnancy, lactation, infancy, childhood, and adolescence, and for athletes."

4. Animal agriculture is responsible for substantial environmental degradation (e.g., topsoil loss, eutrophication from contaminated runoff, spread of bacterial and viral pathogens), and is a leading cause of the release of anthropogenic greenhouse gases which drive climate change. Livestock production may be responsible for more greenhouse gas emissions than all forms of transport combined (FAO Report 2006). Eating animals requires substantially more land, water, and energy input to get the same amount of protein versus eating plants directly. Finally, rampant antibiotic usage in animal agriculture contributes substantially to the rise of antibiotic-resistant bacteria. (Goodland et al. 2009; Eshel and Martin 2006; Pimentel and Pimentel 2003; Heilig et al. 2002; Khachatourians 1998)

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